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## THE IMPACT OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP ON THE SERVICE DELIVERY AT UMHLATHUZE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

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#### Abstract:

This study aimed to investigate the influence of ethical leadership on service delivery within uMhlathuze Local Municipality, Kwa-Zulu Natal; despite having established codes of conduct for councilors and officials, instances of unethical behavior persist, eroding public trust and diminishing employee motivation. The detrimental impact of leaders' unethical conduct on workforce diligence is noteworthy. Widespread corruption in numerous global government institutions, particularly in regions with lax policies, underscores the urgent need for ethical leadership in fostering good governance. However, scant research has delved into the specific context of Kwa-Zulu Natal, particularly examining the repercussions of ethical leadership on service delivery at uMhlathuze Local Municipality. The researcher employed questionnaires to collect data, surveying a carefully chosen sample of 80 respondents from a broader population of 100 within the study area. The obtained field data underwent meticulous analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 29, employing statistical tools such as frequency tables and graphs. Implications include recommendations for leadership development programs emphasizing ethical principles and strategies to reinforce a culture of integrity and effective communication.

**Keywords:** Ethical Leadership, Service Delivery, Local Municipality

## INTRODUCTION

The rampant rise of unethical behavior and corruption across the public and private sectors underscores the urgent need for ethically sound leadership (Khan et al., 2020). Ethical leadership has become a cornerstone of modern leadership, demanding high moral standards and ethical decision-making in leaders across all organizational contexts (Trevino et al., 2018).

Beyond organizational leadership, ethical leadership encompasses broader aspects of organizational behavior and culture. Its core function is guiding organizations through ethically sound decisions impacting employee interactions and relationships (Umbreit, 2015). Ethical leaders are role models, influencing and encouraging ethical conduct within their teams (Brown & Kish-Gephardt, 2019).

Understanding the causes of unethical behavior remains a complex challenge. In the private sector, pursuing profit at any cost, driven by greed and corruption, often fuels unethical practices (Hegarty & Moccia, 2018). Public sector organizations also wrestle with these motivators, with the added challenge of political patronage fostering misconduct (Klitgaard, 2018).

Hegarty and Moccia (2018) identify several factors driving unethical organizational behavior: pressure for shareholder growth, top management's goal-oriented focus, impending financial losses, greed, and ignorance. While ignorance might explain isolated incidents, particularly in local government, the prevalence of misconduct within organizations boasting solid ethical codes and policies suggests deliberate manipulation and a disconnect between leadership and ethical



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principles (Moccia, 2021). Top management's adherence to the organization's ethical code sets the tone for all employees. When leaders disregard ethical conduct, expecting consistent ethical behavior from others becomes unrealistic (Trevino et al., 2018).

Despite established conduct codes for councilors and officials, the uMhlathuze Local Municipality in South Africa grapples with rampant unethical behavior. This has demonstrably eroded public trust, translating into frequent protests against inadequate service delivery. The recent surge of ethical scandals across sectors necessitates a deeper examination of ethical leadership, aiming to equip organizations like uMhlathuze with practical strategies for its implementation.

The environment in uMhlathuze, characterized by political interference and influence from conflicted business leaders, presents significant challenges for aspiring ethical leaders (Gildenhuys, 2017). While South Africa possesses a robust legal framework to address unethical behavior, effective implementation and public accountability measures still need to be investigated (Khan et al., 2020). This study, therefore, aims to explore practical strategies for fostering ethical leadership within South African municipalities.

**Ethical Leadership and Ethical Dimensions.** Ethical leadership involves demonstrating normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and relationships while encouraging such conduct through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making (Brown et al., 2018). Ethical dimensions encompass key character traits of ethical leaders, such as fairness, power sharing, role clarification, people orientation, integrity, ethical guidance, and concern for sustainability (Khan et al., 2017). Fairness means treating others equally and impartially, enabling principled and just choices (Umbreit, 2015).

People orientation, another facet of ethical leadership, reflects genuine care, respect, and support for followers, ensuring their aspirations are fulfilled (Khalid & Bano, 2015). Integrity, a crucial leadership characteristic, implies consistency in words and actions, reflecting truthfulness and authenticity (Palanski & Yammarino, 2019). Additionally, ethical leaders actively communicate about ethics, explain rules, and promote and reward ethical conduct (Kalshoven et al., 2020). Concern for sustainability involves a social responsibility towards environmental stewardship, encouraging recycling and using materials efficiently (Kalshoven et al., 2010).

Practical, ethical leadership requires understanding leadership and ethics as an integrated process and framing actions and goals ethically. Individuals within organizations must adhere to ethical principles relevant to their tasks and functions (Khan et al., 2017). For instance, attending a meeting necessitates active listening to others' ideas and developing practical communication skills. Similarly, providing feedback to leadership truthfully and honestly is crucial when collecting information from individuals in the field (Kalshoven et al., 2020).

**Model of Ethical Leadership.** Individuals seeking to develop their leadership skills and make a positive impact must cultivate an inner commitment to truthfulness and an outward dedication to the common good (Kar, 2020). This begins with personal introspection, identifying and claiming core values, developing a vision for a better future, and finding an authentic voice to articulate that vision. Ultimately, living and behaving in ways that serve the community and advance the common good becomes the outward manifestation of this inner journey (Kar, 2020). Thompson (2018) proposes a model of ethical leadership built on four pillars:

1. **Values:** Ethical leadership begins with understanding and committing to core values. Values encompass standards, principles, norms, morals, and beliefs. Individuals align their choices with their identities at all personal and civic life levels by identifying core values.
2. **Vision:** Vision involves framing one's actions and functions within a desired future state, particularly service delivery. Leaders strive to achieve goals and objectives with a clear vision.



3. Voice: Claiming one's voice means articulating the vision to others in a way that inspires and motivates them to action. Effective communication and speaking the truth are essential for leaders to connect with individuals and guide them in their work.
4. Virtue: Individuals, especially leaders, become what they practice. Cultivating virtue requires consistently practicing virtuous behavior and seeking to do what is right and good. This personal development ultimately contributes to the common good. Ethical leaders constantly ask themselves how their values, vision, and voice can best serve society's well-being (Kar, 2020).

**The Thompson Ethical Leadership Model: A Framework for Local Municipalities.** The Thompson Ethical Leadership Model offers a valuable framework for fostering ethical decision-making and behavior within local municipalities. This model hinges on four interconnected components.

**Moral Sensitivity.** As envisioned by the Thompson model, ethical leaders in local government possess heightened moral sensitivity – the ability to identify and discern ethical issues within service delivery contexts (Thompson, 2018). This sensitivity is crucial for navigating the diverse needs of communities, considering how policies may impact different demographics (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). For example, an ethically sensitive leader implementing a housing initiative would consider the potential impact on various income groups and prioritize equitable access to affordable housing.

**Moral Judgment.** Guided by the Thompson model, ethical leaders in local municipalities engage in sound moral judgment when confronted with ethical dilemmas. This involves analyzing alternative courses of action and carefully weighing the ethical implications of each potential decision (Ciulla, 2004). For instance, when determining resource allocation for infrastructure projects, ethical leaders prioritize projects that benefit the broader community over those aimed at personal gain or political leverage (Cooper, 2012).

**Moral Motivation.** The model emphasizes the crucial role of moral motivation, highlighting that ethical leaders should be driven by a genuine commitment to ethical principles and serve the public good. In local municipalities, such leaders instill a culture of accountability and transparency in service delivery by motivating their teams to prioritize public service over personal or political interests (Treviño & Brown, 2005; Waddock, 2006). This internal drive ensures that ethical considerations remain at the forefront of decision-making and policy implementation.

**Moral Character.** Moral character, the fourth pillar of the model, serves as the foundation for ethical leadership. Leaders with solid moral character demonstrate unwavering adherence to ethical standards, setting a positive example for others within local municipalities (Brown & Treviño, 2006). This consistent, principled behavior not only influences the ethical conduct of individuals in leadership positions but also permeates the organizational culture, impacting service delivery practices and fostering public trust (Lichtenstein, 2011).

**Service Delivery.** Service delivery involves producing intangible or tangible value through providing services. Examples include refuse collection, streetlight connection, road construction, and other public activities or benefits that fulfill needs or satisfy desires (Municipal et al. Centre, 2015; Nealer, 2017). Cloete (2014) views service delivery as implementing specific policy objectives in the public sector with varying degrees of success. Mfene (2019) further emphasizes that service delivery aims to promote the community's overall well-being.

Essential municipal services are critical in enhancing citizens' health, safety, and economic well-being. Municipalities are legally obligated to provide these services (Koma, 2020). Examples include water, sanitation, roads, healthcare, and transportation (Nealer, 2017; Bolatito & Ibrahim,



2014). These services directly impact residents' quality of life, and poor service delivery can negatively affect local industries and job opportunities (Angahar, 2013). Effective service delivery depends on efficient collaboration among stakeholders, including political entities, beneficiaries, and other service providers (Besley & Ghatak, 2017). Continuous analysis of incentives driving these stakeholders is crucial to ensure the best interests of beneficiaries. Enforcement of stakeholder obligations also remains a crucial concern for the public.

**Ethical Leadership and Service Delivery in Government Administration.** Ethical leadership within government administration represents a cornerstone of good governance, contributing significantly to effective public service delivery. The moral credibility of individual leaders plays a crucial role in shaping decision-making and ultimately determines whether they act as ethical or unethical stewards of public trust (Downe et al., 2016).

While many countries, including Finland, maintain a bureaucratic ideal model for local government, a distinct separation between political leaders and public officers remains a persistent aspiration. However, research points to the significant influence of politics within the administration (Joensuu & Niiranen, 2016). This interdependency challenges the notion of distinct spheres and highlights the complexity of their interwoven roles in formulating and implementing policy.

Political leadership's involvement and influence in public administration directly impact core public values, including representation, equity, and individual rights. Representation, essential in a representative democracy, allows people to elect officials who reflect their aspirations and concerns (Moran & Morner, 2017). This value signifies that elected officials act as intermediaries, serving as the voice of citizens in the absence of direct democracy.

In contrast, government practices must ensure fair and equitable resource distribution, preventing the emergence of second-class citizens. Ethical leadership plays a critical role in upholding this value. When political leaders lack ethical grounding, government employees often face pressure to participate in unethical practices, ultimately impacting decisions that directly affect citizens' rights (Pandey et al., 2016).

The lack of appropriate leadership ethics in government officials is a global issue. In the United States, for example, ethical scandals involving political groups, privacy violations, sexual harassment, and misconduct within the military expose the urgency of addressing ethical behavior in leadership (Hassan et al., 2014). A national survey in the U.S. revealed that 57% of government workers observed ethical violations within their workplaces over the past year (Moran & Morner, 2017).

While ethical violations manifest in diverse forms, typical examples include misreporting hours worked, employment discrimination, sexual harassment, and privacy breaches (Irwin, 2016). These ethical dilemmas require serious attention because they harm economies and disproportionately impact the well-being of vulnerable communities globally (Irwin, 2016).

The South African government faces a specific challenge regarding the perception of its leaders from both communities and within its constituencies. However, leadership perceived as "good" does not necessarily translate to ethical leadership. Irwin (2011) suggests that bribery, corruption, and fraud often stem from a lack of ethical principles in leadership. Statistics South Africa (2017) data indicates that only 24% of South Africans believe corruption has decreased, while 62% perceive it as rising. This highlights the public's view of public servants as potential perpetrators of corruption, underscoring the crucial need for robust ethical leadership to combat such practices.

Fostering ethical leadership within government administration can significantly improve public service delivery. Recognizing the interconnectedness of politics and administration, focusing on core public values like representation, equity, and individual rights, and addressing global

challenges of unethical conduct are crucial steps toward building public trust and ensuring ethical governance.

## METHODS

The study is quantitative, and the results were measured numerically and analyzed. The study adopted a positivist philosophical approach and applied a descriptive cross-sectional research design. This study explores ethical leadership's impact on service delivery at uMhlathuze Local Municipality, Kwa-Zulu Natal. A quantitative research approach was employed using a closed-ended questionnaire as a research instrument. The study sought to present recommendations to uMhlathuze Local Municipality to effectively enhance ethical leadership and service delivery.

The research objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the factors that influence ethical leadership at uMhlathuze Local Municipality;
2. To ascertain the impact of ethical leadership on the service delivery of uMhlathuze Local Municipality and
3. To provide recommendations on how ethical leadership can improve service delivery at uMhlathuze Local Municipality.

The target group for this study consisted of 100 employees in the uMhlathuze Local Municipality. The selection of the population for the framework of the study was based on the database provided by the Human Resources Department. According to the Morgan sample size table developed by Sekaran and Bougie (2014), 80 were used and selected through random sampling. Data was collected using a close-ended questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS version 29.0. Chi-square test, Pearson correlation coefficient and regression analysis were conducted to establish the factors affecting ethical leadership and to establish linkages between ethical leadership service delivery in the study area

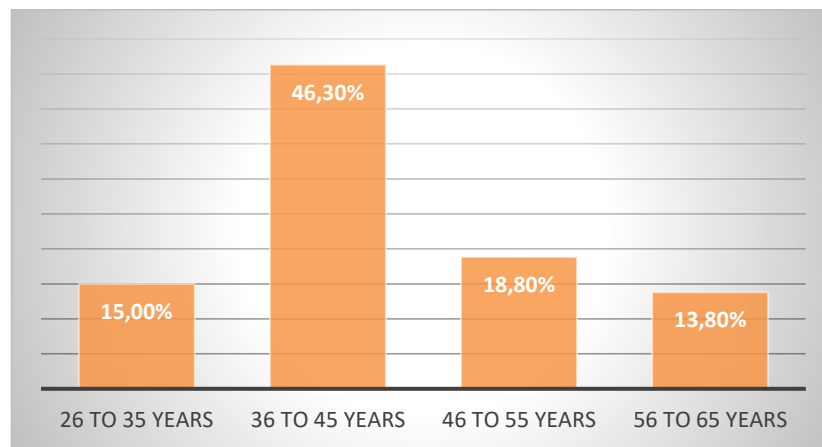
Reliability, as defined by Kumar (2019), pertains to the stability and consistency of scores obtained from an instrument. This implies that the scores should remain consistent when the instrument is administered multiple times in different instances. On the other hand, validity, as described by Creswell and Creswell (2017), concerns the meaningfulness of individual scores obtained from an instrument, enabling researchers to draw accurate and valuable conclusions regarding the sample population under study. Cronbach's alpha score of 0.651 was recorded on all the statements/questions of the questionnaire. This highlights a reasonable level (65.1%) of internal consistency regarding all the items in the questionnaire.

This study strictly adhered to all ethical guidelines set forth by Durban University of Technology, including human science ethical considerations. The research process underwent a thorough review and gained approval from the relevant department and faculty, ensuring compliance with ethical requirements. Before participation, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the researcher maintained confidentiality and privacy throughout the study, respecting the confidentiality of the participants' information.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

**Descriptive statistics.** This section provides a general overview of the sample statistics better to understand the respondents' demographic and background information.

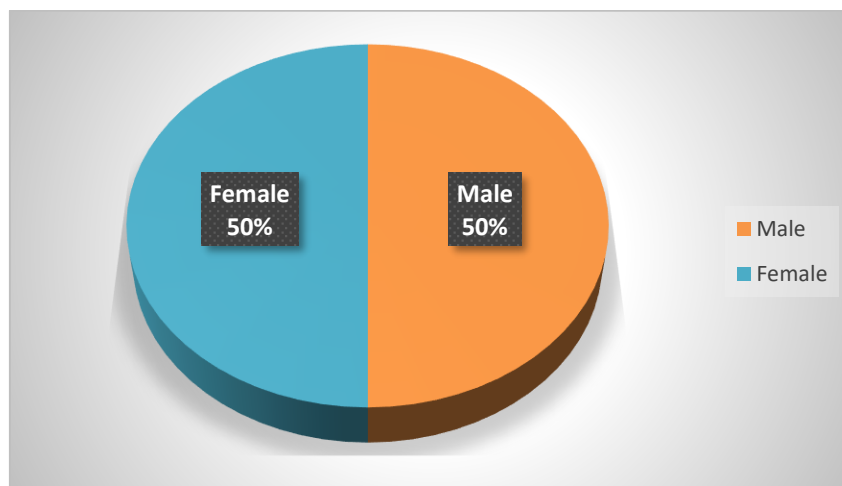




Source: Data Processed 2023

**Figure 1.** The age group of the respondents

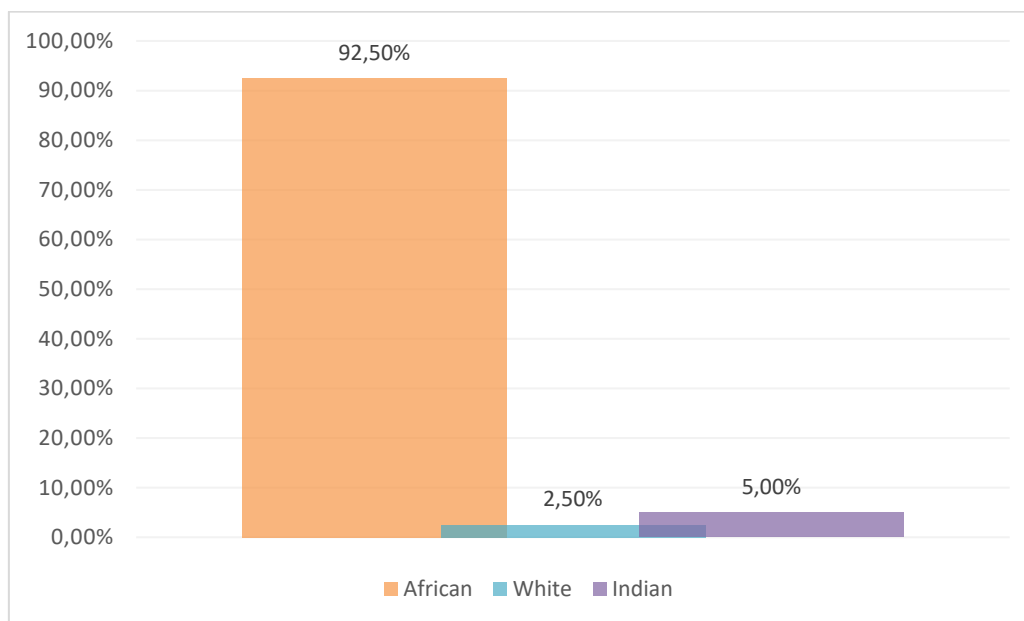
Figure 1 shows that 46.3% of respondents were 36-45 years old, and 18.80% were in the 46-55-year age group. Then, 15.0 percent of the respondents were in the range 26-35 years, and 13.8% of respondents were between the ages of 56-65 years. Therefore, it can be concluded that most of the employees were below 45. These findings compare well with the study of Billet (2020), who indicated that a public sector employee may be between the ages of 25 and 50. Moreover, the findings of other countries like Zambia show significant similarities to those found in the current study.



Source: Data Processed 2023

**Figure 2.** The gender of the respondents

The results showed a similar percentage of female (50%) and male (50%) respondents in the study area, as shown in Figure 2. The result means that in the last ten years, there has been an improvement in women's employment in local municipalities, reflecting the government's effort to promote women's emancipation and empowerment (Dennis, 2019, p. 89). These findings are not in line with the findings of Yellowes et al. (2015), who found that in South Africa, half of the employees in the local government are females.



Source: Data Processed 2023

**Figure 3.** Race of the respondents

Figure 3 above reveals that out of 80 respondents who participated in the study, 92.5% were Africans, 5% were Indians, and 2.5% were whites. These results are supported by the findings of the study conducted by ABSA (2019), which concluded that in KwaZulu Natal, the majority of employees in local government are Africans. This is no surprise since the uMhlathuze area is predominantly African, and according to BBEE, the government must promote the employment of disadvantaged Africans.

**Table 1.** The length of employment

Length of employment	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than five years	15	18,8	18,8
5-10 years	37	46,3	65,0
11-15 years	16	20,0	85,0
16-20 years	11	13,8	98,8
Over 20 years	1	1,3	100,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100,0</b>	

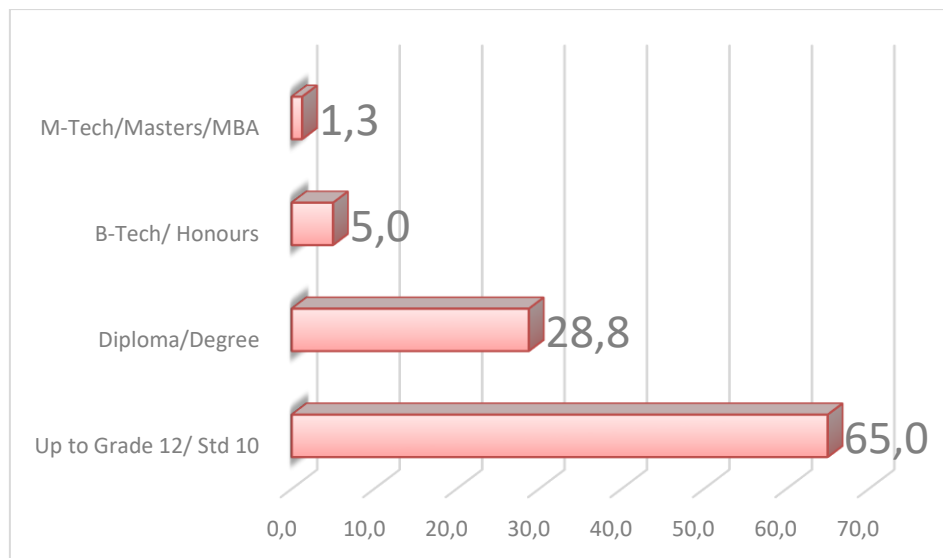
Source: Data Processed 2023

As highlighted in Table 1 above, the majority of the respondents (65%) had been employed in the municipality for ten years and below; 20% of the respondents had been employed for 11-15 years, while 13.8% of the respondents had been employed for 16-20 years and the remaining 1.3 % of the respondents had been employed for more than 20 years. The analysis above shows that the uMhlathuze Local Municipality has a lower labor turnover than other municipalities. These findings are similar to those of Moyo (2019:90); most local municipalities in Kwa-Zulu Natal experienced low labor turnover.



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Source: Data Processed 2023

**Figure 4.** Academic Qualification

The survey results indicated that 65% percent possessed a national diploma in the study area. A total of 28.8% of the respondents possessed a diploma/degree, while 5% of the respondents possessed a BTech/Honours degree, and the remaining 1.3% percent held M Tech/ Masters/ MBA degrees. Thus, the results revealed that the majority of the respondents were educated. It has been found that employees with higher levels of education are likely to be more ethical and productive (Peters & Bridjlal, 2011, p. 90).

**Table 2.** Factors influencing ethical leadership

Factor (s)	Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Total
Code of conduct	81,30%	17,50%	1,20%	0,00%	0,00%	100,00%
ethical climate	60,00%	38,70%	1,30%	0,00%	0,00%	100,00%
Education and training	76,30%	23,70%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	100,00%
Communication	71,30%	28,70%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	100,00%
Legislation, by-laws or organizational policies	60,00%	36,30%	3,70%	0,00%	0,00%	100,00%
Organization culture	33,80%	56,20%	10,00%	0,00%	0,00%	100,00%
Organizational structure	37,50%	58,80%	2,50%	1,20%	0,00%	100,00%



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Source: Data Processed 2023

The results in Table 2 show the perceived importance of factors influencing ethical leadership at uMhlathuze Local Municipality. 98.8% of the respondents indicated that the code of conduct was either significant (81.3%) or necessary (17.5%); 1.2% indicated that the code of conduct was neither essential nor unimportant as a factor that influenced ethical leadership. This implies that employees of uMhlathuze Local Municipality are aware of the importance of the code of conduct as essential to ethical leadership and service delivery. These findings are supported by the study conducted by Du Plessis, Hargovan and Harris (2018), which concluded that Municipalities that attach greater importance to a code of conduct provide ethical leadership.

Table 2 reveals that 98.7% of the respondents indicated that employees were either significant (60%) or necessary (38.7%) in influencing ethical leadership. The remaining 1.3% indicated that ethical climate was neither essential nor unimportant. The above finding shows that most respondents know the importance of ethical climate as a critical factor in ethical leadership.

Regarding the importance of education and training as factors that influence ethical leadership, an analysis of the responses indicated 76.3% of respondents were significant; 23.7% indicated it was necessary. The results indicate that most respondents know the importance of education and training in practicing ethical leadership. This aligns with Moran and Morner's (2017) study, which delves into ethical leadership behaviors in the public sector. Their findings contribute to the broader understanding that education and training are integral to ethical leadership practices (Moran & Morner, 2017).

In terms of how vital communication was in achieving ethical leadership at uMhlathuze Local Municipality, the results in Table 2 indicate that the most significant number of respondents (71.3%) view communication as very important, and the remaining 28.7% indicated that it was necessary for achieving ethical leadership at uMhlathuze Local Municipality. The results show that employees at uMhlathuze Local Municipality attach great importance to communication in achieving ethical leadership at uMhlathuze Local Municipality. This emphasis on effective communication aligns with Pandey, Davis, Pandey, and Peng's (2016) exploration of public good leadership and bureaucratic corruption. While their focus is on corruption, acknowledging the importance of communication in ethical leadership resonates with the uMhlathuze study (Pandey et al., 2016).

Table 2 also reveals the responses on the importance of legislation, by-laws or organizational policies in influencing ethical leadership in the study area. 96.3% of the respondents indicated that legislation, by-laws or organizational policies were very important (60%) or necessary (36.3%), and 3.7% were neutral. The results are consistent with Chisala's (2008) findings on the local government sector in Zambia, which identified a positive relationship between legislation, by-laws or organizational policies and ethical leadership.

Regarding the importance of organization culture at uMhlathuze Local Municipality, an analysis of the responses indicated that a total of 90 % of the respondents revealed that organizational culture was very important (33.8%) or necessary (56.2%) and 10% of the respondents indicated that perceived organization culture towards the ethical leadership (Table 4.3). The results indicate that most respondents know the importance of perceived organizational culture towards ethical leadership. Building on this, the study parallels Hassan, Wright, and Yukl's (2014) exploration of moral courage, highlighting the interconnectedness between organizational culture and ethical leadership (Hassan et al., 2014).

The results in Table 2 show the perceived importance of organizational structure in the study area. 96.3 % of the respondents indicated that organizational structure was either significant (37.5%)



or essential (58.8%). Respondents who indicated that organizational structure was unimportant amounted to 1.2%, and 2.5 % of the respondents indicated that organizational structure was neither essential nor unimportant to ethical leadership. This implies that employees know the importance of organizational structure as a critical factor in achieving ethical leadership.

**Inferential Statistics.** Let: The municipality's leadership conveys that integrity and ethical values cannot be compromised, both in words and deeds, as V1.

Leadership has developed a code of ethics that emphasizes the municipality's expectation that employees will act with integrity in all actions related to their scope of employment V2.

**Table 3.** Correlations

		V1	V2
Code of conduct	Pearson Correlation	-0,208	0,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,064	1,000
	N	80	80
ethical climate	Pearson Correlation	-0,205	0,011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,068	0,926
	N	80	80
Education and training	Pearson Correlation	0,189	0,079
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,094	0,484
	N	80	80
Communication	Pearson Correlation	0,018	0,046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,875	0,687
	N	80	80
Legislation, by-laws or organizational policies	Pearson Correlation	-,221*	-0,186
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,048	0,098
	N	80	80
Organization culture	Pearson Correlation	0,085	-0,055
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,453	0,630
	N	80	80
Organizational structure	Pearson Correlation	0,008	-0,004
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,945	0,974
	N	80	80

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).



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Source: Data Processed 2023

The correlation table (Table 3) presents the relationships between factors influencing ethical leadership at uMhlathuze Local Municipality. Understanding the dynamics of ethical leadership and its impact on service delivery is crucial. The study investigates correlations between ethical leadership indicators, focusing on the municipality's code of conduct, ethical climate, education and training, communication, legislation, by-laws, organizational policies, organizational culture, and organizational structure.

**Code of Conduct and Ethical Leadership Indicators.** The correlation coefficient between the code of conduct and critical ethical leadership factors is noteworthy. The negative correlation between the code of conduct and ethical climate ( $-0.208, p = 0.064$ ) suggests a potential misalignment between the formal code of conduct and the perceived ethical climate. Previous research by Du Plessis, Hargovan, and Harris (2018) supports this, emphasizing the importance of a congruent organizational climate with the code of conduct for effective ethical leadership.

Additionally, a significant negative correlation with legislation, by-laws, or organizational policies ( $-0.221, p = 0.048$ ) indicates a potential tension between formal regulations and the code of conduct. Chisala (2008) found that a harmonious relationship between organizational policies and ethical leadership is crucial for promoting ethical behavior in the public sector.

**Ethical Climate and Organizational Factors.** The negative correlation between the ethical climate and the code of conduct ( $-0.205, p = 0.068$ ) suggests a disconnection exists between the perceived ethical climate and the formal code of conduct. This contradicts the findings of Hassan, Wright, and Yukl (2014), who argue that a well-established code of conduct positively influences ethical leadership.

**Education and Training Influence.** A positive but non-significant correlation between education, training, and ethical leadership ( $0.189, p = 0.094$ ) indicates a potential positive trend. This aligns with the findings of Moran and Morner (2017), emphasizing the role of education and training in promoting ethical leadership behaviors in the public sector.

**Communication and Ethical Leadership.** The correlation between communication and ethical leadership is positive but weak ( $0.018, p = 0.875$ ). While communication is essential (Pandey et al., 2016), the weak correlation suggests that other factors may substantially impact ethical leadership at uMhlathuze Local Municipality.

**Organizational Culture and Structure.** Organizational culture exhibits a positive but weak correlation with ethical leadership ( $0.085, p = 0.453$ ). The weak correlation contrasts with the findings of Hassan, Wright, and Yukl (2014), emphasizing the critical role of organizational culture in ethical leadership.

The correlation between organizational structure and ethical leadership is negligible ( $0.008, p = 0.945$ ). This is consistent with the argument that organizational structure may not be a significant determinant of ethical leadership (Du Plessis, Hargovan, & Harris, 2018).

**Let the following be:**

Ethical leadership enables the municipality to provide relevant, timely, cost-effective and valuable services that are beneficial to the citizens be V3

Ethical leadership enables the municipality to provide services that meet users' needs most efficiently and effectively, V4.

Ethical leadership influences the extent to which the municipality's output, performance or service satisfies the client and meets the required quality and standard of V5.



The municipality's services are available at the time and scale that the user needs them because of V6's ethical leadership.

The municipality's services are delivered regularly and on time because of V7's ethical leadership.

**Table 4.** Chi-square Test

Test Statistics	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7
Chi-Square	26,450 <sup>a</sup>	58,525 <sup>b</sup>	37,975 <sup>b</sup>	51,700 <sup>c</sup>	45,900 <sup>c</sup>
df	1	2	2	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000
a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 40,0.					
b. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 26,7.					
c. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 20,0.					

The chi-square values for all variables (V3 to V7) are statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), highlighting a substantive association between ethical leadership and the specified aspects of service delivery. The findings underscore the pivotal role of ethical leadership in shaping the municipality's service delivery mechanisms.

**V3: Relevant, Timely, Cost-Effective, and Useful Services.** The chi-square statistic for V3 is 26.450 ( $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), suggesting a significant association. Ethical leadership is positively linked to the municipality's capability to provide relevant, timely, cost-effective, and valuable services. This aligns with arguments from diverse studies emphasizing the positive impact of ethical leadership on organizational performance and service outcomes (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

**V4: Services Meeting User Needs Efficiently and Effectively.** The chi-square statistic for V4 is 58.525 ( $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), indicating a robust association. Ethical leadership is connected to the municipality's ability to meet user needs efficiently and effectively. This concurs with the findings of studies that highlight the positive impact of ethical leadership on organizational effectiveness and service provision (Eisenbeiss et al., 2019).

**V5: Satisfaction with Output, Performance, or Service Quality.** The chi-square statistic for V5 is 37.975 ( $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), revealing a significant relationship. Ethical leadership correlates with the extent to which the municipality's output, performance, or service meets client satisfaction and quality standards. This is consistent with literature emphasizing that ethical leadership fosters a culture of quality and excellence (Den et al., 2012).

**V6: Availability of Services as Needed.** The chi-square statistic for V6 is 51.700 ( $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating a substantial association. Ethical leadership positively influences the availability of services at the time and scale users require. This supports the argument that ethical leadership contributes to efficient resource allocation and service responsiveness (Riggio & Kernahan, 2021).

**V7: Regular and Timely Service Delivery.** The chi-square statistic for V7 is 45.900 ( $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), signifying a significant association. Ethical leadership is linked to the municipality's ability



to deliver services regularly and on time. This aligns with research suggesting that ethical leadership promotes organizational efficiency and reliability in service delivery (Eisenbeiss et al., 2019).

## CONCLUSION

The study highlighted the perceived importance of various factors, including the code of conduct, ethical climate, education and training, communication, legislation, organizational culture, and organizational structure. The majority of respondents recognized the significance of these factors, reinforcing the importance of a multifaceted approach to ethical leadership in the municipality. The correlation table provides valuable insights into the intricate relationships between factors influencing ethical leadership at uMhlathuze Local Municipality. While some correlations align with existing research, discrepancies indicate the need for further exploration. The test statistics underscore the significant association between ethical leadership and various dimensions of service delivery at uMhlathuze Local Municipality. The findings suggest that ethical leadership contributes positively to the municipality's capacity to provide relevant, efficient, and quality services. The results align with existing research on the positive impact of ethical leadership on organizational performance and service outcomes in the public sector.

The study's findings carry profound implications for both academic and practical domains. Ethical leadership emerges as a linchpin for fostering a positive work environment, promoting employee well-being, and enhancing service delivery. As a practical recommendation, uMhlathuze Local Municipality should prioritize leadership development programs that emphasize ethical principles and align with the identified factors influencing ethical leadership. Moreover, ongoing efforts should reinforce a culture of integrity, effective communication, and adherence to established policies.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The sample size, although representative, may limit generalizability. Future research could expand the scope by incorporating additional municipalities or employing longitudinal studies for a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between ethical leadership and service delivery over time.

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